United Nations A/69/125/Add.1

General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 August 2014

Original: English

Sixty-ninth session
Items 24 (a) and 137 of the provisional agenda*

Operational activities for development: operational activities for development of the United Nations system

Joint Inspection Unit

Selection and appointment process for the United Nations resident coordinators, including preparation, training and support provided for their work

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Selection and appointment process for the United Nations resident coordinators, including preparation, training and support provided for their work" (see A/69/125).

* A/69/150.

14-58440 (E) 150814

Please recycle

Summary

In its report entitled "Selection and appointment process for the United Nations resident coordinators, including preparation, training and support provided for their work" (see A/69/125), the Joint Inspection Unit identifies and analyses the existing challenges faced in the selection and appointment of resident coordinators, along with the activities associated with their preparation, training and support, and makes recommendations intended to lead to improvements in the selection and appointment process.

The present note reflects the views of organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided in the report. The views have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which welcomed the report and supported some of its conclusions.

I. Introduction

1. In its report entitled "Selection and appointment process for the United Nations resident coordinators, including preparation, training and support provided for their work" (see A/69/125), the Joint Inspection Unit identifies and analyses the existing challenges faced in the selection and appointment of resident coordinators, along with the activities associated with their preparation, training and support, and makes recommendations intended to lead to improvements in the selection and appointment processes.

II. General comments

2. United Nations system organizations welcome the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the selection and appointment of resident coordinators and note that the Unit identifies most of the key issues and challenges pertaining to that particular selection and appointment process. Organizations appreciate the fact that the findings contained in the report are well-substantiated, balanced and offer possible solutions to improve the selection and appointment process. They indicate that even though the report does not always recommend a clear direction for overcoming the challenges identified, in many instances the Unit provides options to consider.

3. Organizations note that, while the report offers a positive view of the process of selecting and appointing resident coordinators, a considerable amount of effort goes into ensuring that the system of resident coordinators functions effectively. The Joint Inspection Unit suggests, and agencies concur, that the United Nations system has made progress in this regard, especially through measures that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has implemented to fulfil its responsibilities in accordance with the management and accountability framework of the United Nations development and resident coordinator system, including the functional firewall. These include establishing country director positions (where it makes financial sense to do so) and recasting the job descriptions of resident representatives, deputy resident representatives and country directors to clarify how the day-to-day management of UNDP business is conducted, so that resident coordinators can carry out their system-wide role.

4. Nevertheless, for some agencies, the functional firewall for the resident coordinator system remains less than fully effective and in their comments several agencies expressed concern about the functional role of the resident coordinators in general and about their relationship to UNDP in particular. These organizations agree with finding 1, in which the Joint Inspection Unit notes the lack of a genuine sense of common ownership among the members of the United Nations Development Group and suggests that the problem stems from a conflict of interest inherent in the role, noting that the resident coordinators both coordinate the work of the United Nations country team and, in their capacity as resident representatives, also compete for space and funding with country team members. While the Unit indicates that a properly functioning management and accountability system could address this issue, some organizations do not believe the existing management and accountability system goes far enough in ensuring a functional firewall. Furthermore, an agency suggests that the establishment of a better division of labour among members of the United Nations development system at the country level,

under the resident coordinators' leadership, needs to be addressed, in line with paragraphs 18, 117 and 120 of General Assembly resolution 67/226, in which the Assembly recognized the importance of promoting a better division of labour, as well as the need to improve coordination, taking into account the mandates, experience, expertise and strategic plans of United Nations system entities. All of these factors have an impact on the buy-in by agency managers and staff.

5. Several agencies suggested mechanisms to improve the functioning of the resident coordinator system. One organization suggested including seasoned and high-performing resident coordinators in a talent pool of senior United Nations staff, without administrative ties to their organization of origin, at the unique disposal of the Secretary-General. This would offer career opportunities to talented individuals from various United Nations organizations, render the resident coordinator function more attractive, create the conditions for truly managing talent at the inter-agency level and address the issue of grade-level retention for those who are promoted while serving as resident coordinators.

6. Another organization noted the difficulty of maintaining the impression that resident coordinators are impartial as long as they hold UNDP contracts. This could be avoided by centrally financing the resident coordinator system and by further breaking the link between them and any particular organization of the system, thereby allowing resident coordinators to act as facilitating and supporting entities for all United Nations agencies.

7. Several agencies noted that resource limitations would probably constrain their ability to address points raised in the report. For example, in paragraph 56 of the report, the Joint Inspection Unit calls for the Office of Human Resources Management of the Secretariat to be more proactive and supportive of United Nations Secretariat entities involved in the resident coordinator system. The Office notes the difficulty of responding immediately and directly owing to constraints on its capacity and because most of the Secretariat does not currently have resources earmarked for the purpose of identifying and preparing candidates for the position of resident coordinator. Nevertheless, it does plan to work with other parts of the Secretariat to review options that might enable the development and implementation of appropriate guidelines and/or coordination on the identification, screening and preparation of such potential candidates.

8. Some comments focused on the process for the selection and appointment of resident coordinators. One organization noted that the profiles for these positions focused on broad development work, which may prove a disadvantage to some entities, especially the specialized agencies, as most of their staff are specialized in a particular field rather than just in economics, international relations, international development etc. Some organizations noted that while the pool of resident coordinators may reflect diversity in terms of gender and geographical distribution, there is a lack of diversity in terms of the organizations of origin. Furthermore, organizations suggested that, even though UNDP strives to maintain a functional firewall, these efforts are complicated when a significant percentage of resident coordinators originate in UNDP. Organizations suggested that a wider representation of agencies within the resident coordinator community could mitigate this challenge.

9. While agencies expressed appreciation for the finding and the suggestions related to the appointment of resident coordinators, they also expressed regret that

the suggestions did not lead to more explicit recommendations on how the process could be improved. For example, while organizations appreciated that, as noted by the Joint Inspection Unit, "inspectors cannot make a substantive determination as to whether UNDP candidates are advantaged in any way in the final stage of the selection process", they also noted that a comparison, by organization, between the number of candidates who passed through the Resident Coordinator Assessment Centre and the number of successful candidates who were appointed could have led to a more in-depth analysis.

10. Agencies also commented on portions of the text of the report. One agency sought to clarify an omission in paragraph 35, which contains information on the gender and geographical details of appointed resident coordinators, noting that some resident coordinators are also deployed to special political missions, and that these deployments should have been taken into account. It was also suggested that the paragraph could have benefitted from a further disaggregation of the data, particularly as regards peacekeeping, and it was noted that various officials were currently carrying out multiple functions ("double-hatting"). Of those officials, 15 were Deputies in peace operations, 13 were Assistant Secretaries-General and 2 were Directors at the D-2 level. One Assistant Secretary-General and one Director (D-2) were women. It should be noted that, in 2013, only one woman was nominated to "double-hat" in the position of Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

11. In terms of cost-sharing, agencies noted that there appears to be little on this subject in the report except in regard to the training of resident coordinators, whereas the issue of centralized costs versus local cost-sharing does not appear to have been adequately addressed. For some organizations, there remains some confusion, at the field level, as to which costs actually fall within the domain of the 10 resident coordinator functions, how much of those costs are covered centrally and the extent to which local cost-sharing would be required. Organizations called for additional clarity as a matter of priority. Furthermore, one organization noted, in response to the conclusion of the Joint Inspection Unit contained in paragraph 116 that training costs be added to the resident coordinator cost-sharing arrangement, that organizations have limited budgets and true limitations on how much they can contribute to the cost-sharing arrangement and that other sources of funding should also be considered.

III. Comments on specific recommendations

Recommendation 1

The General Assembly, through the quadrennial comprehensive policy review process, should establish long-term targets to be achieved with regard to diversity among resident coordinators in terms of North-South balance and organization of origin. The Economic and Social Council should, within the quadrennial comprehensive policy review process, monitor the implementation of measures taken to attain such targets.

12. Noting that this recommendation is directed at legislative bodies, organizations of the United Nations system generally agreed with and supported it, along with the broad finding in the report that diversity among resident coordinators with respect to gender, source organization and North-South balance — although the highest ever

and on a positive trend — could be further enhanced. This message was reiterated by Member States in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review and prioritized in the relevant action plan of the United Nations Development Group. As mentioned in the general comments, many organizations noted that addressing the lack of diversity within the resident coordinator community from organizations of origin would also support the implementation of the functional firewall.

13. While supporting the recommendation, some organizations expressed concern with regard to the setting of targets and stressed their agreement with the opinion of the inspector that targets should not be achieved at the expense of the general principle that the most qualified candidates be selected for the post. In addition, some organizations emphasized the importance of having measures that promote resident coordinator talent from within the United Nations system and of ensuring that the selection process be independent of the size of the operational activities of the organization of origin and its willingness to bear the cost.

Recommendation 2

Executive heads of United Nations system organizations who have not yet done so should instruct their human resources management offices to develop and implement appropriate guidelines for the identification, screening and preparation of potential resident coordinator candidates as soon as possible.

14. Organizations of the United Nations system welcomed and accepted recommendation 2, and many indicate a willingness to put the suggested guidelines in place. Organizations also welcomed several of the associated suggestions embedded within the text of the report, citing in particular paragraph 51, in which other United Nations entities are called upon to undertake efforts similar to those undertaken by UNDP to further gender diversity, and paragraph 53, in which it is stated that all entities should nominate a greater number of qualified candidates and the increased number of nominations should better reflect the required appointment criteria. Furthermore, agencies also noted the issue of costs related to the assessments and welcomed the suggestions in paragraphs 60 and 61 on having a dedicated budget line to cover costs associated with the Resident Coordinator Assessment Centre and a mechanism for reimbursing successful candidates who participate in the Centre.

Recommendation 3

The Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, should initiate, through the United Nations Development Group, the review and revision of the standard operating procedures of the Inter-Agency Advisory Panel, as needed:

(a) To ensure a more open nomination process for candidates who are already in the pool of resident coordinators;

(b) To address the possibility of incorporating interviews for shortlisted candidates at the request of the Panel, to better advise the Chair of the United Nations Development Group on their suitability for a particular position;

(c) To change the present voting system to establish a minimum required number of support votes (preferably 50 per cent of those voting) for a candidate

to be shortlisted for consideration by the Chair of the United Nations Development Group.

15. Organizations of the United Nations system supported a review and revision of the Inter-Agency Advisory Panel, as called for in recommendation 3. Agencies shared the concern expressed in the report with respect to the perception that the selection process of resident coordinator candidates has resulted in a trade-off for organizations between professionalism and selecting the "agency candidate", as expressed in paragraph 74. Therefore, organizations welcomed the opportunity to explore, through the workings of the Panel, ways to improve the overall quality of candidates nominated by the organizations, leveraging existing instruments for quality assurance. At the same time, while agencies supported an "open nomination process", as called for in subparagraph (a) of the recommendation, some remained unclear about the specific issues driving this aspect of the recommendation.

16. Organizations also welcomed the proposal in subparagraph (b) to offer the option to interview shortlisted candidates so as to better inform the Chair of the United Nations Development Group of their suitability for a particular position, noting that this option already exists in the standard operating procedures of the Inter-Agency Advisory Panel with respect to candidates for the positions of executive representatives of the Secretary-General, deputy special coordinators or deputy special representatives of the Secretary-General, and that it could be expanded further.

17. While organizations generally supported subparagraph (c), they suggested that the Inter-Agency Advisory Panel consider the recommendation and present any changes as a recommendation to the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination through the United Nations Development Group.

18. More generally, agencies also expressed support for the suggestions in paragraph 67, notably the call for the Chair of the Inter-Agency Advisory Panel to discuss ways and means of giving more time and weight to the discussions on candidates.